

## ON TRACK WITH MDT

A few years ago, MDT's contract plans staff began working with Montana contractors on improving our bidding process by making information available as quickly and easily as possible.

Our rationale was simple. The paper process we relied on was prone to problems, and everyone was frustrated by the delays these issues were causing.

Simplifying the bidding system is not an easy task, and we are still in the process of refining and improving our services. I want to thank the members of our contracting community for your invaluable input in this regard, and I want to take a few moments to highlight the changes we have made – not only because I want to expand the community's familiarity with our process, but also because I hope to encourage new bidders to use our online services..

One of the biggest changes we made was switching from a paper bidding process to an electronic bid system, or EBS, which is available for download on our Contractor's System web page, <http://www.mdt.state.mt.us/cntrct/contract.htm>. As anyone who's used this system can tell you, it allows the contractor to figure and input the unit price, with EBS calculating the total item price as well as the total bid. If an item is omitted or any information is missing, EBS automatically notifies the user that the bid is not complete. The program allows the user to toggle back and forth between English and metric units, and it allows the user to export to and from estimating packages and Excel. Thanks to the recent efforts of a regional consortium, the program now figures the DBE (or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) participation percentage when the user inputs the dollar amount of the work the DBE firm plans to do.

But that's not all. Because of contractor input, all contractor documents are now available online: plans and proposals, addenda, standard specifications, detailed drawings and supplementals. Again, at the contracting community's request, we have split the files in to sections, making them easier to access, view, zoom and print. For those who prefer, these documents are also available on CD. There is no end user fee for any of these services, which provides substantial cost savings to the contracting community.

Even with these changes, project specific questions still arise during the advertisement period. An online Question and Answer Forum was initiated last April to answer these questions in a manner that provides the same information to all contractors. The Q & A Forum is now part of the contract and is the required means for asking project-specific questions during the project advertisement period. You can view the forum at <http://www.mdt.state.mt.us/scripts/cntrct/qaforum/qahtml.pl>.

And more changes are in the works. As of late December, Preliminary Plans are posted on our web site, along with a form fill questions and comments area that should help us catch needed changes before the project is advertised for letting.

MDT is also working to develop Site Manager, a system that will enable us to manage projects from pre-construction through final payment. Implementing online bidding through Bid Express will be key, as will adding modules such as DSS, a statistical analysis program. Our programming staff are working diligently to implement these modules, and we will keep you apprised of our progress in 2004: developing these services will not only save both MDT and the contracting community time and money, but they will also provide analytical capabilities that were previously unavailable.

As we move forward, we'll need your input on how these services are working, and we'll be counting on you for honest feedback. Working together is the only way we can improve our bidding process and become more efficient – and that is key to staying “on track” with you, the future of MDT.

I wish you a prosperous and happy 2004.

Dave Galt  
Director